The Colonial American Origins of Modern Democratic Thought, by J.S. Maloy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008; pp. ix + 214. £45).

In this terse, dense volume, J.S. Maloy brings historical insights gleaned from seventeenth century Anglo-America to bear on the political science of modern democratic theory. This is a welcome cross-disciplinary foray that has much to offer by centring on the intellectual matrices of the English Atlantic world in a time of profound upheaval in political ideas and their viability. Pre-empting the limelight occupied by the American Revolution and the Glorious Revolution, Maloy's spotlight is fixed upon a pivotal concept rather than a founding event or pioneering theoretician: the principle of accountability. In marshalling his evidence around accountability, which he describes as a magnetic north for the evolution of democratic theory, Maloy offers a fresh perspective that downgrades the pre-eminence of the electoral process in the transition towards greater popular control over government. In his analysis, some of the conceptual and practical pioneers of this seminal principle of extra-electoral accountability were English colonists in North America.

Maloy locates the moment that democratic theory modernised *before* the contributions of Hobbes and Locke, whom he describes as "derivative and even backward-looking figures" (p.52). He begins by tracking the novel ideas of accountability adapted from Roman law and put forward by sixteenth-century theorists of resistance, such as Scottish humanist George Buchanan. These ideas developed in tandem with strengthening understandings of popular sovereignty, but did not yet integrate with them; theorists tended to accept elite rather than popular control over agencies of accountability.

It was in the maelstrom of the mid-century that Levellers most openly connected these strands, radicalising accountability and insisting that the lower social orders held the right to scrutinise and sanction even their parliamentary representatives. Their hope, manifested in the democratic constitutionalism of their proposed *Agreement of the People*, was that besides overhauling elections, the building of non-electoral institutional mechanisms of accountability would preclude further descent into civil war: "they did not in fact consider regular elections to be a sufficient or even a primary mechanism of democratic deterrence; that job required other, non-electoral procedures" (p.46) – such as general liability and special inquests, especially at a local level. Some of the Levellers' innovations and preoccupations, Maloy goes on to explain, were actually prefigured by a number of writers involved in early Anglo-American colonial ventures – a commonality he explains with a rather oblique reference to sharing a "state of nature" or institutional vacuum.

Maloy devotes one chapter to "Fidelity and Accountability in Virginia and Bermuda," in which he marshals impressive primary evidence effectively to provide a careful dissection of the various conflicting models of governance propounded by the likes of John Smith, Thomas Smythe, Edwin Sandys, Nathaniel Butler, and most interestingly John Bargraves. As Maloy demonstrates, Bargraves's visionary political thought has been under-explored, and contained a unique blend of the moralism, pragmatism, and factionalism that riddled contemporary debates over Virginia. But more noteworthy for Maloy's purposes, in his 1623 "A Forme of Polisie," Bargraves proposed an intra-colonial mechanism of accountability in the form of a "Syndex" of fifteen individuals drawn from across the social orders, whose task would be to both audit and impeach

"all the great councillors." The chapter also demonstrates some of the ways in which the practice of accountability was compromised by the challenges of transatlantic operation.

The centrepiece of Maloy's colonial case (chapters four to six) comes from New England, and intuitively this makes sense of course, since puritans came pre-packaged with pretty concrete ideas about accountability and covenant. He launches into the ecclesiology of John Robinson and the Plymouth pilgrims and proceeds to work through relevant debates in church and state among puritan leaders such as John Cotton, Richard Mather, John Winthrop and Thomas Hooker, each of whom came to support or challenge democratic accountability in various forms. It is unclear why Maloy emphasises continuity between the political thought of New Englanders and Virginians/Bermudans (on the strange grounds of the formers' "reliance on the writings of Capt. John Smith" (p.87)) rather than the far more significant transoceanic linkages and migrations of puritan communities and ideas. But his fundamental point is that in the New England colonies, the contest to control executive authority (in church and state) pivoted around attempts to instigate mechanisms of accountability, and that somewhat ironically, the development of elections as the primary mechanisms of popular control over the direction of government represented a victory for ruling authorities (notably John Winthrop) who sought to evade alternative more stringent forms of accountability.

In places, including a couple mentioned above, Maloy's claims are excessively bold: it is a push to suggest that these colonial American developments, though they may have been under-acknowledged, represented "the birth of modern democratic theory" (p.1), especially since little attempt is made to explore the historical or direct epistemological connections between his American subjects and their English adherents until the conclusion. Moreover, for historians in particular, Maloy's keenness to propel his findings into twenty-first century democratic theory comes with a heavy associated cost. Though he is right to observe that the field of seventeenth-century British American political theory warrants fresh interpretation, engagement with the historiography is thin, and this reviewer does not recognise the characterisation of a scholarly consensus that views the political formations of the early Anglo-American colonies as "inert, unoriginal, and uninteresting" (p.13), or a view that "problems of the young colonies…were at bottom problems of trust" (p.62). For his colonial context, Maloy seems to draw heavily on Osgood (1907), Andrews (1934) and Craven (1949), where more recent scholarship, or even the work of the likes of Jack P. Greene, Mark Noll, and Michael Kammen at the nexus of political, religious, and social history might have offered profitable guidance – especially with a view to linking colonial conditions to intellectual and constitutional innovations, and extending beyond the puritan colonies. Even in relation to New England, surprisingly, Maloy does not engage with the (profoundly anti-accountable) ideas of Sir Robert Filmer, although Mary Beth Norton, among others, has argued that Filmer's insistence on the analogous relationship between the family and the state dominated power structures in New England.

In spite of these discipline-specific reservations, *The Colonial American Origins of Modern Democratic Thought* nonetheless offers a new angle and an intriguing new conceptual emphasis that scholars in early modern political history, especially those

with an interest in New England, should find engaging, and may be inclined to test more empirically.

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